



American Citizen Services Unit
U.S. Embassy Santo Domingo
Warden Message



TO: Consular Wardens
FROM: ACS Unit
DATE: June 2, 2006
SUBJECT: Ciguatera Fish Poisoning

Following is a Warden's Message being transmitted for your information. Please circulate this to your constituents.

The U.S. Embassy has received information about a recent case in Barahona in which several individuals were hospitalized, and one died, from eating a fish that had ciguatera toxin. In this particular case, a group of 28 people ate a "Picua" (Barracuda) fish and all of them went to the hospital. A man in his 50s died of the Ciguatera toxin; the others recovered.

We would like to take this occasion to remind people about the need to be extremely careful about eating locally caught fish. Specifically, this serves as an important reminder that Ciguatera is found throughout the Caribbean and can also be found in the waters of Puerto Rico and Florida. Ciguatera is a food-borne disease contracted by eating toxic fish that have eaten other toxic fish or have eaten a small single marine plant called "Gambierdiscus toxicus" that grows on coral reefs. The plant is found more commonly during the spring and summer months and is especially stimulated to grow during periods when the reef is disturbed, such as during storms or other conditions that lead to environmental reef damage.

Please remember that cooking does not destroy the cigua toxin nor is its incidence in fish related to methods of storage. Furthermore, there is no easy way to identify a fish with this toxin. It cannot be tasted in the fish nor is there a change in the appearance of the fish. The only way to avoid Ciguaterea is to simply avoid eating a fish with the cigua toxin:

Avoiding Ciguatera

Prevention is to avoid eating fish that may be exposed to the toxin, i.e. ocean fish that feed on reefs. Deep ocean fish such as shark, marlin, salmon and tuna do not feed on the reef and are therefore usually safe. You should also know that the toxin does NOT affect shellfish; so lobster, shrimp and other shellfish are considered safe.

Symptoms

The toxin affects the central nervous system and symptoms can range from very mild to severe. Fatalities have been reported. Illness typically begins with gastrointestinal symptoms (diarrhea, nausea and vomiting) within 2-6 hrs after eating a toxic fish. These symptoms affect the nervous system, causing numbness and reversal of hot and cold sensation, especially around the mouth, tongue and fingers. Muscle aches and weakness in the legs can occur, as well as lowered blood pressure, blurred vision, itching and fatigue. Some of these nerve symptoms can be severe enough to limit breathing or result in temporary paralysis that can persist for weeks or months. Permanent nerve damage can also occur.

There is no specific treatment for this toxic illness. Supportive therapy, including IV fluids, antihistamines and other medications may be used as symptoms occur. Artificial life support may be necessary in extreme cases.

Hospitalization is recommended as soon as possible should you have these symptoms.

Americans living or traveling in the Dominican Republic are encouraged to register with the U.S. Embassy through the State Department's travel registration website, <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. **American citizens who have previously registered with the U.S. Embassy do not need to register again.**

For updated information on the security situation in the Dominican Republic, please contact the American Citizens Services (ACS) Unit of the U.S. Embassy. The Consular Section Embassy is located at the corner of Cesar Nicolas Penson Street and Máximo Gómez Avenue, Santo Domingo, D.R.; telephone 809-731-4294; after hours emergency telephone 809-221-2171; ACS unit fax 809-689-6142; e-mail acssantodom@state.gov; web page www.usemb.gov.do.

Updated information on travel in Santo Domingo may be obtained from the Department of State by calling 1-888-407-4747 within the United States, or from overseas, 1-202-501-4444. For further information please consult the Consular Information Sheet for Santo Domingo, which is available via the Internet at <http://travel.state.gov>.